

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

School Committee Meeting

East Providence High School – Auditorium

2000 Pawtucket Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

April 25, 2007

Open Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:00PM. All members were present: Robert Faria, Eileen Lovett, David Medeiros, Steven Santos and Mildred Morris. Also present: Dr. Jacqueline Forbes and Andrew Thomas, Esq. A motion was made by Mrs. Lovett to move to Executive Session in accordance with RI General Laws, Section 42-46-5 (a) (1) Personnel, (a) (2) Collective Bargaining/Litigation, (a) (5) Lease Options, seconded by Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0.

The School Committee returned to open session at 7:00PM. A motion was made by Mr. Medeiros to return to public session and seal the minutes of the executive session, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was observed.

Report of the Superintendent and Staff

FY 2007-2008 School Budget Options

Mrs. Morris thanked everyone for coming and advised that at the beginning of the process to address the school department's budget problems, she asked the school committee to schedule public hearings for that purpose and Dr. Forbes presented several options to further cut spending, by considering the realignment of the district's student population. Options ranged from merging schools, to seeking revenue by leasing closed buildings, to obtaining relief from union contractual obligations. After receiving public input at the meetings of April 9th and 10th, one reaction emerged that parents, students, staff, community activists and others voiced strong support for the continuation of the current set-up of neighborhood schools and strong support for our two high performing middle schools to remain open.

Mr. Santos agreed to accept a petition on behalf of the School Committee from Hailey Vine, who asked that he present it to Dr. Forbes and the School Committee. The petition contained approximately 1471 signatures of individuals opposed to closing Riverside Schools

Dr. Forbes advised that at a meeting two weeks ago, information was shared on cost saving options of the School Department, facing an impending budget deficit, and the School Committee and Superintendent heard from the community regarding their clear

support of maintaining neighborhood and middle school concepts; this affirmation by the public was appreciated. The School Department will continue to look for ways to reduce spending as it has in the past by continuing to meet with the City Council to avoid duplication of services through consolidation, continuing to seek relief from union contracts and legislative mandates and to request additional appropriations from the City.

A motion was made by Mrs. Lovett to further explore Option E (the option to surplus the Platt/Watters property); look to lease or sell the Platt/Watters property contingent upon City Councils approval that the funds come back to the school department and to dismiss all the other options, A, B, C, and D, seconded by Mr. Medeiros. Under discussion, Mr. Santos asked about the status of bargaining unit negotiations. Dr. Forbes stated that negotiations and conversations are taking place, but no agreements have been made as of this date. Roll call vote: Mr. Faria, aye; Mrs. Lovett, aye; Mr. Medeiros, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mrs. Morris, aye.

Public Comment

Robert Enos thanked everyone, but felt that work needs to be done as a team to improve budget standing in the community; students, parents, and community showing sensitivity of closing of schools and the impact on the budget, which allowed the community to have input, but we have to strive to protect students and the pockets of

citizens. He thought this was taking a long time; there is a need to merge departments and a need to move at a faster pace. Closing Platt/Watters is a good idea. He complimented Dr. Forbes for facing the problems.

Tracy McCaughey, 1114 Bay View Avenue, thanked the School Committee; this has been an extremely emotional couple of weeks and she appreciated the work that went into it. She asked about the fact that the motion made was contingent on the City giving the funds to the school department; what will happen now. Mrs. Morris said it will have no bearing on the schools. She said this is a multi pronged problem, which is not up to teachers, City Council or School Committee; it is up to all to fix this, because parents don't want to be here again next year and cooperation is needed for everyone to come forward and do their part, with everyone chipping in to run high performing schools. Thanks to the Superintendent..

A student, Hailey Vine, thanked all parents who signed the petition and to the School Committee for receiving it.

Debbie Voll, Allison Avenue works at the state house and commented that Mr. Medeiros had attended a hearing there this week, following up on bills at the state House and Mrs. Lovett was at the State House today.

Student (Souza) thanked the School Committee; this decision means

a lot.

Kelly Rock – thanks; she is looking forward to attending Riverside Middle School.

Mr. Martin – the community has supported the school system over the ages; as a business man, the budget is based on revenue and the budget must be cut when revenue is down, if not, people will be hurt. He said this all falls back to the taxpayer. The School Committee has their backs against the wall, but it would not have happened without opposition. Revenues are tight; gas prices going up; some have created the problems which exist; he won't know until next years' tax bill, but he said the well is running dry.

Carol Calder, 35 Lottie Drive, thanks to Dr. Forbes and the School Committee for emailing back. The information was put out to people to go to the budget meetings; need to let elected officials know they are here to stay and mean business that they want the schools to stay open.

Parent and student – thanks for keeping Silver Spring open.

Mr. Melo, Willet Avenue asked for a point of clarification; he asked about Option E and how much the savings would be; this is only \$614,000 against a 2.3 million deficit. He asked where the money is coming from; it will come off everyone's backs until we look at more

decent option. He wants schools open, but he sees problems on the backs of the community. The School Committee is putting this back on the City Council and he sees it as a bogus solution; the community is facing deficits all over the place, and there are no solutions other than a \$614,000 savings, which looks good for elected officials.

Mr. Gouveia, Riverside, School Committee has done what the RI General Laws has charged them with, which is taking care of the students. It is the City Council's job to determine what money the School Committee gets to run the schools. He hoped all have learned a valuable lesson; the populace is much brighter than what they have been credited for. The potential of closing schools caused angst, which was a mistake. School Committee should have gone public with charging the Superintendent to explore possibilities; there would not have been rumors and same thing would have taken place. He cautioned that if there are dire circumstances, School Committee should let the public know at the beginning and the public would not have liked it. Also, Mr. Medeiros and Mr. Faria are doing hard work on the budget; the focus is on the education of young students; we need to get focus back to education.

Leanne Towne – thanked the School Committee and wanted to promote the upcoming golf tournament for Riverside Middle School.

Mr. Carter –asked how many children have the literacy of a 12th

grader, to be able to write and do math at Grade 12 level compared to how much money actually goes to their education. He looked at a website and found that 44 million public education students can't fill out a bank slip; he asked where East Providence kids fall on this issue, since the SAT scores are down (the State dropped 8 points). He felt that the School Committee should be addressing these issues.

Patti Streit Indian Road – said she is a product of East Providence Schools and is proud of the schools; her daughter is doing well and she wanted to thank the system for providing a good education. She explained that the East Providence Education Foundation needs community support for better schools; (initially she became involved through the closing of her daughter's school). She asked for a round of support for East Providence Schools.

Deb Cherwin – works for schools; her kids are very successful products of East Providence Schools and she does not like people demeaning the schools. She thanked the School Committee and Dr. Forbes for keeping the schools open.

Parent – concerned about the process and confused about the financial crisis two weeks ago; hopes information will come out to the public quickly.

Kelly Cipriano Westwood Avenue, thanks for the decision; she liked the honesty of Mr. Gouveia to tell people about the problem up front.

She would like the City Council and School Committee to get together, since we are a community and are in the same boat as every other community. She asked that School Committee and City Council use the resources of the community; ask people to help; it is difficult to come to meetings, but she will attend and feels strongly about the School system

Mrs. Morris thanked all for participating and for their hard work and to support the School Committee at budget time also.

A motion was made by Mr. Medeiros to adjourn at 7:50PM, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Eileen Lovett, Clerk of the Committee